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LOVE AMONG THE DOCTORS.

ANNETTE L. NOBLE.

A LONG old-fashioned house has a porch at each end. Curious strangers inquire if it is a "Water Cure," and are told that here live the Titustown doctors. Over the east door is the modest varnished sign of "Dr. Nettleton." On a crooked pole, before the western porch, is a great brazen pestle and mortar, the emblems, so to speak, of "Dr. Weatherbee;" thus under one roof live two of a trade, who, contrary to precedent, agree most admirably. Entering the west door we find a little parlor, into which the sun rushes riotously. The wool is worn off the old Brussels carpet, the sofa springs are broken, and the lamp needs washing. Alvira Gibson, the doctor's housekeeper, is sitting by the window, cutting out butternut-colored pantaloons with a pair of tailor's shears. Alvira is not handsome; youthful indulgence in jaundice has tinged her complexion in maturity. Her scanty hair, rusty iron color, is parted like a man's in front, and culminates in a button on the back. Collars she eschews, but admires carpet cloth slippers of vast dimensions. At another window is Jerome, the doctor's nephew; a lawyer, with a handsome clear-cut face. Doctor Weatherbee is also at home. Yesterday he mounted into his gig and scoured the country like an incarnate tornado, with a big yellow dog howling in the rear. The horse ran over a calf, the dog scared children into fits, the gig parted company with the harness and sent the portly doctor over backwards into a mud hole; so, to-day, he stays at home and has the rheumatism. He is stretched on the floor, full length, face down; while a tall mulatto boy is coolly walking up and down his spine and legs, from his shoulders to his heels. This performance means only to the initiated that Steve is treading the rheumatism out of Doctor Weatherbee, according to directions.

"Doctor, here's a boy after ye," said Alvira, hanging a skein of linen thread on her peg of not very plentiful hair.

"What is wanting, Bub?"

"Ma's sick—s'got spavins o'pain in her chest like she had afore, says she wants—"

"Wants to take boneset tea—ten drops of laudanum, and stay in bed till she gets over it," put in Alvira, who never failed to prescribe for the doctor's patients before the doctor had a chance.

"Be still," grumbled that worthy, half rising to bring out a wallet whose knives, saws, scissors and lancets froze the small boy stiff with horror. A paper of dingy powder was found, and Steve sent for a pint bottle of bitters. At this the boy found breath, and producing a vial the size of a baby's finger, said, meekly: "Mar guessed a little *pul—p'lsatilla* was what she wanted."

"Confound your Mar!" roared the doctor. "Go home, and let her smell of the cork!"

The boy started in dismay, then turned to flee.

"Hold on!" roared the doctor again. "Go around to the other door, your mother sent you to Nettleton."

The eastern door was overgrown with roses and opened into a room with white curtains, easy chairs, a canary in a gilded cage, and a doctor after the child's own heart—a small nice man, whose words dropped out softly. He wore a clean white linen coat, and sat before a case like a candy shop. He furnished the medicine, gave the boy some sugar pills for private consumption and sent him away rejoicing. Then, leaning back in his chair, Dr. Nettleton might have had an afternoon nap, but for his daughter Maud, who appeared and asked: "What was in that letter you had this morning?"

"Durand, the young foreigner, who is coming to study medicine, will be here next week."

"I don't want him here—he will be a nuisance!"

"Don't be childish."

"Who ever says I am?"

"Jerome did," said her father, sleepily; at which Maud tossed her head and went to walk in the garden.

Maud had a wicked mouth, melancholy eyes—could not help knowing she was wonderfully pretty. She spent the most of her time disputing with Jerome. He was peculiarly exasperating. Once she read him a poem of Alida Smythe's, her bosom friend, and Jerome said she was *callow*—Alida was.

This afternoon Jerome joined her and said: "What a first class hypocrite that boy Steve is!"

"Why I thought Steve was very pious."

"Yes, in his way—his favorite air is:

'I'm all the time *tryin'*,
All the time *tryin'*
To climb up Zion's hill!"

but he must tumble back after every trial, or else the climbers are not what fancy paints them. Steve forgets to bring back change, and he is an unconscionable beggar. I have refused him my clothes, from my Panama hat, around by my cuff buttons, down to my boots. It don't discourage him from beginning next day at my boots and going back to my hat. There he is now, puffing a cigar behind the hay-stack; he says he never touches tobacco."

"I am going down by the old mill," said Maud, unlatching the gate, and Jerome followed.

"Mr. Winterton Durand is coming next week."

"Who is Mr. Winterton Durand?"

"A very agreeable, well-educated young man, so father says—a student."

"How pleasant it will be for him."

"In what way?"

"In the way you make it pleasant for me—by being the best little sister in the world."

"I may not choose to play sister."

"No; you may prefer to be 'a nearer one still and a dearer one.'"

"It would be nothing to you if I should," she added pertly.

"Oh, yes it would."

"How?"

"You are too young for such folly. If you 'go silly' at this stage of your life it will be your 'ruination,' as Gibson says."

"Pray tell me what I now am?"

"I will tell you what you *have*—a tongue like March, a temper like April, a face like June, and a heart like July."

"April-like temper—how *original*! Humph!"

"No—I do not think you *are* silly—you lack discipline."

"You want to be an old Mentor; you think you have the experience of Methuselah, the wisdom of Solomon, Socrates, Confucius, and, and—"

"Heliogabalus would round your period well, as far as mere sound is concerned."

"I detest such people."

"As Heliogabalus? Well, let him go, you like me much and I like you more."

"Gee-rome! Supper's ready," shouted Alvira from the garden gate.

Doctors Nettleton and Weatherbee were half-brothers, which fact accounted for the intimacy between the two families. Before Durand had been long in Titustown, he passed in one door as often as in the other; the difference being that he was not as welcome in Alvira's domains as in Maud's. He was fair haired, with an aristocratic moustache, and eyes very like a cat's. His manners were oppressively perfect. Alvira hated him. Jerome went fishing with him once, and ever after each seemed repelled by the other. Maud and the black boy were Durand's friends. A "loud" necktie and a pair of silver studs won the Ethiopian's heart, while Maud found new attentions and compliments quite pleasing.

"Don't be fooled with *that* beau," was Alvira's injunction. "All such silliness don't mean anything. I know by the cut of him that he is prancing around for the fun of it. Good luck deliver us from foreigners—they make the *wearingest* husbands this side of Purgatory! Sister Car'line had a foreign beau that about eat her up a courtin'—sendin' of her hot-house bouquets big as lettuce-heads—then every time she looked at cousin Ike he be so tearin' jealous. Car'line got sick of his capers, and said 'go.' Well, he was so penitent he fairly howled—vowed he was *crushed*. In order to starch him up again, she married him for better or for worse, and got the latter instant. He set right up on his foreign grit and talked about 'my-hi house,' and 'my-hi wife,' as if he'd been a nine-tailed bashaw. I abominate foreigners! Rub this fellow's fur the wrong way, and you'll see sparks fly—you'd feel claws too if he dared scratch!"

"What a croak," laughed Maud, running away; "I simply consider him a very interesting man."

Nevertheless, when girls "simply consider some young men as interesting," the simplicity of their emotion is apt to become quite complex. Durand took Maud for a ride; then came a lettuce-head bouquet which Maud kept out of Alvira's sight. They read poetry together; the tender passages were not omitted; the young man "minded his pauses," and Maud blushed to perfection. Doctor Nettleton,

watching matters over his gold glasses, went around to hold a consultation with his colleague. Doctor Weatherbee roared with laughter, and said it was "a clear case of puppy love;" whereat his homœopathic brother went away comforted. So the Summer passed. Stopping at the vine-covered door one evening, Jerome found Maud and Durand—watching the moon of course. Jerome, watching nearer earth, saw something whiter than a moonbeam pass from the foreigner's hand to Maud's, then into her pocket.

"A *love letter*," he soliloquized, "the goslings!"

That night he refused to be sociable with Alvira, who wanted to talk, as she sewed white cotton patches on a red flannel petticoat.

Maud's first love-letter—how delightfully original it was! She had imagined that "dear-darling," possibly "*preciouses*" would exhaust the vocabulary. How mistaken she had been! But next day she appeared to Durand, who was fishing by the mill, seated herself on a log, with the look on her face of a child who "aint going to do so no more, no, never!"

What Maud had done, was to let Durand beam at her over the vegetable tureen, squeeze her hand a few times and talk—oh, the most incredible amount of soft talk.

"I have been thinking, Mr. Durand, that I must tell my father. It is deceitful to be taking notes, and bouquets, and candy, and listening to so much—talk."

There was a big bump of obstinacy under the foreigner's light hair. He instantly made up his mind that the doctor should *not* be told.

"What good would it do? You are so young, he would not consent to an engagement; and Alvira would brawl our affairs all over the neighborhood. I am proud and sensitive—pride and sensitiveness are characteristic of *my* family."

Durand's inflexion of the pronoun, recalled to Maud Alvira's *bete noir* and his "my-hi" family.

"Very well, we will be simply friends."

Durand took this again quite like "Sister Car'line's husband." Not that, like his prototype, he "howled," but he protested. He dropped on his knees and wept; he accused her of loving Jerome. He threatened to kill somebody. He pulled his aristocratic moustache so savagely that Maud was at her wit's end. What an episode it was! Something like her favorite heroine's! How she would report this interview to Alida Smythe! But she must be calm and firm even if she suffered dreadfully—that was the *rôle* for a heroine.

"I cannot yield, Mr. Durand. Be noble—be generous and, and—"

A grandiloquent speech was cut short; Jerome's boots came crashing down underbrush as their owner approached, whistling "O ye tears"—this hearty young man sang pathetic airs of late. Durand revolved into a seat. Maud exclaimed: "Is that you, Jerome? Well, you gentlemen can entertain each other; it is time I was home."

That night, as Maud sat in Dr. Weatherbee's parlor, holding yarn for Alvira, Steve dropped a letter in her lap. Alvira eyed it sharply; but failed to see, what Jerome did, the large "D" on the envelope.

"I have a great many letters," stammered Maud, "Alida has written twice since I wrote to her."

"What a *big* hand she writes—just like a man's," quoth Alvira.

Maud dropped a few threads of yarn; Alvira was winding rapidly and it made bad work. For brevity's sake, we give only the outline of Durand's letter: He felt bad—blasted. Maud need never look upon his face again. He would write to Dr. Nettleton when he was calm enough. Jerome was a blackleg; old Weatherbee a bear; Alvira a gossip. He forgave them all, and hoped the Lord would punish them for turning her against him. Finally—the 6.40 train would bear him to remote regions, there to reside for ever. The 6.40 train had left; Maud retired and cried. So much high tragedy had given her the head-ache. For several days she slighted her bread and butter, and sang Tennyson's

"Too late! too late! Ye can not enter now!"

until Alvira declared she made her flesh creep.

Maud was not the only one in the old double house who was having an experience. The sight of the big "D" on that envelope had, in some sort, stirred angry passions in Jerome's breast. The week Durand left, Jerome was ready to marry Maud himself; and it was his opinion he would make her the best husband in the world. Moreover, being ignorant of his rival's exact advantage, he resolved to follow Alvira's

unsolicited advice to do his "prettiest to trip up that pestiferous, foreigner." As yet all, save Maud, supposed Durand called away upon business and soon to return; so Jerome went to work with a will.

But Durand returned, at the end of a month or two, and demanded of Doctor Nettleton the hand of his daughter. Asking time for deliberation, the doctor called a council of three: the *bear*, the *black-leg* and the *gossip*.

Jerome was non-committal: Alvira proposed putting the suitor on probation for a term of *ten* years. Old Weatherbee said, he'd "come down flat-footed and tell the feller to *scud*"—for he was much annoyed by his everlasting manners."

Maud was pronounced as too young to be engaged. Durand's way of receiving the verdict was the very exemplification of "fur rubbed the wrong way."

Now let us drop a few weeks out of the calendar. A clumsy old carriage was drawn up in front of the house one day, for Maud, Alvira, the doctors and Steve were going to a country picnic. Durand was to have gone also, but "urgent business" prevented.

"Hurry up, Alvira," shouted Dr. Weatherbee.

"Be there in a jiffy," called that lady, snapping the hooks off her black basque. Alvira *full-dressed* so seldom she always made a fiasco of it.

"I'm not going now," said Maud, appearing for a moment.

Doctor Nettleton sighed, and Dr. Weatherbee roared out "Where's Steve?"

Jerome going to the barn, found the boy harnessing the doctor's pony into a light carriage.

"What *are* you doing Steve?"

Steve started. "Wall! why yer see—"

"What do I see," said Jerome, collaring the youth. "I see a pair of Durand's light pants on you! For what is that horse harnessed?"

"Oh, nuthin', nuthin'! Yer see; yer see—"

"Out with it."

"Yer see he's guine to take a ride. Wall yer see, Miss Maud, yer see. I can't tell!"

"Steve, if you don't stop 'yer seeing,' and tell what you are about—Jerome reached after the horse-whip.

"He'll kill me if I tell!"

"So will I, if you don't."

"Lemme go," Steve blubbered, like a great baby.

"Steve confess; if you don't hurry, they shall go without you, and I will try and make it unpleasant for you at home."

Steve confessed and departed. Maud took her book into an arbor near the house. Jerome sat where he could see her—or a gleam rather, of the red shawl she wore. At noon, a child came for a box of pills; Jerome told her to run to the barn and see if the gray pony was still there. She came back and said it was *not*. Jerome hurried to the arbor; Maud had gone and the red shawl hung on the bench, the feathers of a bird that had flown. Five minutes

louder than was necessary, that he "could break every bone in his body."

Durand was up in a second, flourishing a revolver. There was a struggle—a scuffle—and Jerome was shot? Not at all. The revolver fell between them to the grass. Then Durand pushed Maud aside, sprang into his carriage and dashed around the hill.

"Granter Grievous!" vociferated Alvira, as Jerome drove up to the old house; "where have you two been? We got home an hour ago."

"I've been feeling the cat's claws," said Maud.

"Let us alone," remarked Jerome, as both doctors

appeared with mouth agape; "we'll tell you another time."

After that day came real trouble to Maud—the belief that Jerome despised her. His conduct to her was cold indifference, and in time left Titus-town without mention of return.

"Lor," said Alvira, on a dark November afternoon, "whatails you? Don't be so melancholy."

"I think I am tired of living. Alvira! There is not much comfort in the world is there?"

"Heaps of it; only life is like a hot poker; you've to grip in the right spot or you'll burn your fingers."

"I am lonesome."

"You'r pinin' after that light-livered foreigner."

"Now Alvira, you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Wall, you'r hankerin' after somebody. Get the jaundice, like me, and you'll turn yeller; fall in love, and you can't hide it any better."

"With whom could I be in love, Alvira?"

"With Jerome."

Maud choked, answering: "Jerome thinks I am silly and deceitful."

"Now I guess he does," said Alvira, with a horrible grimace toward an adjoining room.

Maud began to cry. Alvira withdrew precipitately, first swooping out her long arm and curled up forefinger, as if to beckon in some unseen auditor.

"Jerome thinks you are an *angel*," declared that individual, taking possession of the weeper, and kissing her seven or so consecutive times without let or hindrance. Then he called her an angel again.

What a relief it would be, doubtless, to that class of created beings, if there were other celestial tribes to which adorers might occasionally refer the adored. There are not; the angels have endured it so long, they will have to stand it while the world lasts. With which moral observation the story ends.



SABBATH EVE.—AFTER OPPENHEIM.

later Jerome was driving out of town at a rate that would have distinguished him on a race-course. Ten miles on the road ran through a wood, and curved down a bend. At the foot of the hill, Jerome reined in his horse, and heard the voices of Maud and Durand. Their horse was drinking and they were standing on the ground talking earnestly. Jerome came nearer. Durand was saying, "I tell you, you don't know your own mind; you will be sorry if you go back."

"I can't be more sorry than I am. Take me home; no one need ever know we were going to run away."

"You are making a fool of me; I won't consent."

"I will go home to father, and Jerome, and the rest of them. I shall walk back."

"Ha! Let me help you into the carriage."

Jerome knocked him down; remarking, rather